DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 604 EC 308 589

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TITLE	Leading Inclusive Programs for All Special Education Students: A Pre-Service Training Program for Principals.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2001-04-00
NOTE	11p.; Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Assistant Principals; Beginning Principals; *Behavior Disorders; Curriculum; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; Higher Education; *Inclusive Schools; *Leadership Training; Management Development; *Principals; Program Design; Program Evaluation; School Administration; School Supervision; Special Education; *Supervisory Training; Training Methods

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a model program for training pre-service elementary and secondary school principals in educationally sound and legally defensible inclusion programs extending to students with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD). The program has three major objectives: (1) to train pre-service school administrators (principals and assistant principals) in the leadership and management of school-based special education programs; (2) to train pre-service school administrators in system-change strategies related to the implementation of an effective school-based special education program for students with behavioral disorders; and (3) to disseminate the outcomes of the training project on a regional, state, and national level. The program is in its third year of implementation and includes customized courses in special education law and curriculum, instruction, and program design, leadership institutes on specially selected topics, a year-long practicum, and individual portfolios for demonstration and evaluation of the applied competencies. A total of 38 participants have been served and now show competencies in the learning and behavioral characteristics of students with disabilities, knowledge and skill in supervision of staff in inclusive classrooms, skill in financial analysis and management of special education programs, knowledge of special education law, and knowledge of best practice on inclusive programs. (Contains 33 references.) (CR)

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Leading Inclusive Programs for all Special Education Students:

A Pre-Service Training Program for Principals

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Sponsored by
U.S. Department of Education
Personnel Preparation to Improve Service and Results for Children with Disabilities
Projects of National Significance
CFDA 84.325.N

Poster Session 50.03
American Education Research Association
2001 Annual Meeting
April 10-14, 2001
Seattle, Washington

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With the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA97) and the increasing number of children identified as needing special education, the principal's role is changing. The appropriate implementation of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mandate depends not only on well-trained teachers, but also on well-trained school administrators, particularly principals. Today, this cadre must include principals who are equipped with legal, pedagogical, and cultural knowledge. They must employ practical strategies to initiate and support effective inclusion of all special education and at-risk pupils, specifically those from diverse backgrounds and those with behavioral problems.

The principal is key to the success of instruction at the building level (Sergiovanni, 1991). Moreover, the principal's leadership was cited as critical for successful inclusive programs both structurally and philosophically (Guzman, 1994; Guzman and Schofield, 1995). Further, case study analyses stress the role of the principal as the school's instructional leader (Kaskinen-Chapman, 1992; Porter and Collicott, 1992; Schattman, 1992; Servatius et al., 1992). The school principal is able to directly influence "resource allocations, staffing, structures, information flows, and operating processes that determine what shall and shall not be done by the organization" (Nanus, 1992). Therefore, it follows that for a school to effectively address the needs of its special education population, the principal must display a positive attitude and commitment to inclusion practices and poses the skills and knowledge to lead the staff to create an inclusive learning environment (Evans et al., 1992; Rude and Anderson, 1992).

Since the early 1980s, research indicates that the principal plays a major role in shaping teacher attitudes, behaviors, and overall school climate (Leibfried, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1984; Tyler, 1983). The decision to develop an inclusive school depends largely upon values and beliefs (Goodlad and Levitt, 1993). A principal's positive attitude is an essential factor in creating a climate of acceptance for all students and programs. For example, Bank Street College of Education (1982) found that "the principal sets the tone for the staff, students, parents, and community attitude toward special students." Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, and Schattman (1994) found that "principals were essential to the implementation of LRE policy in their schools and that they either facilitated or constrained placement of students in general education settings." In a study by McAneny (1992), principals whose attitudes were reported as more positive toward mainstreaming were more likely to provide opportunities for students with special needs to remain in regular classes. Furthermore, principals communicate their attitude consistently in a variety of ways to students, staff, and parents and expect them to support this attitude through their own behaviors (DeClue, 1990; VanHorn, 1989). If inclusion is to work, its success will depend heavily upon the readiness and the willingness of the principal (Ayres and Meyer, 1992). To promote seamless integration of special and regular education programs, principals must possess the attitudes, skills, and practical strategies to facilitate inclusionary practices.

Attitude is important to the success of inclusion. Brinker and Thorpe (1985) reflect the status of attitudes toward inclusion. In their study, negative attitudes dominated and were attributed to insufficient pre-service training, limited resources for

teachers, scarce knowledge of best practices, and limited personal experiences with students with disabilities.

Nevertheless, where inclusion is valued and resources are available, the resulting attitudes are positive. From a survey of 680 regular educators, including principals, Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1996) reported mostly positive attitudes. Their attitudes were associated with administrative support, time to collaborate, and more experiences with disabled students. Age and grade level of students and the concentration of disabled students affected attitudes. The respondents in this study were located in thirty-two sites in the United States and Canada where heterogeneous educational opportunities for all children were valued.

In another study, York and Tundidor (1995) found attitudes to be important. They asked focus groups of general and special educators, parents, students, administrators, and support staff about their perceptions of factors that influence the practice of inclusion. Attitudes and skills of service providers in schools and the allocation of collaboration time were perceived as necessary to success. Barriers to success included rigid general education expectations, insufficient staffing and materials, lack of collaboration time, and fear that "regular" students would be disadvantaged by inclusion.

Principals cannot ignore rising expectations related to inclusion. The principal is now expected to design, lead, manage, and implement programs for all students (Sage and Burrello, 1994). Principals must evaluate and develop ways to improve the acceptability of all students, especially those who are most rejected (Garver-Pinhas and Schmelkin, 1989). They must learn to monitor and evaluate the inclusion process.

They must identify relevant antecedents that lead to inclusion and assess the degree of inclusion (Wisniewski and Alper, 1994). These new responsibilities call for administrators to promote visions and values and to encourage students, teachers, parents, and community members to act positively toward inclusion. Other new administrative roles include identifying and articulating the needs of inclusive schools and providing an important link between the schools and the larger community (Falvey, 1995).

In spite of the overwhelming need for training, evidence suggests that many school administrators are seriously lacking in several critical competencies for effective implementation of inclusion for all categories of students with disabilities, this is especially true for E/BD students. For example, in a national survey of teachers and administrators regarding the implementation of inclusion programs, Greyerbiehl (1993) found five barriers to inclusion: 1) ineffective training programs, 2) poor leadership strategies, 3) burdensome beliefs and attitudes, 4) lack of teacher support, and 5) poor communications. Similarly, other studies revealed that administrators and other educators had inaccurate knowledge (Belcher, 1996) and misinformed attitudes (Cutbirth and Benge, 1997; Monahan et al., 1997) about the legal boundaries and effective practices for integrating students with disabilities into general education settings. Principals expressed little knowledge of pertinent court decisions and identified the need for formal training in special education law (Pilcher, 1996).

Principals are reported to be spending between 15 and 45% of their time dealing with issues related to special education. At the present time only seven States require any training in the area of special education to become certified as a principal. This

training is often limited to a three-credit class in the Exceptional Child (Tryneski, 1999). A national study of 23 administrator preparation programs and 457 educational administration students found that special education is treated inadequately, if at all, in programs designed to prepare school leaders (Sirotnik and Kimball, 1994).

To prepare competent principals who are able to lead an innovative faculty and a diverse student body, training must be in line with the current occupational demands. This poster session will present a model program for training pre-service elementary and secondary school principals in educationally sound and legally defensible inclusion programs extending to students with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD).

The program has three major objectives. 1) To train pre-service school administrators (principals and assistant principals) in the leadership and management of school-based special education programs, 2) To train pre-service school administrators (principals and assistant principals) in system-change strategies related to the implementation of an effective school-based special education program for students with behavioral disorders, and 3) To disseminate the outcomes of the training project on a regional, state and national level.

The project is in its third year of implementation. A total of 38 participants (in three cohorts), enrolled in the Elementary or Secondary Principal Certification program have been served. Students show proficiency in the following competencies:

A) knowledge of the learning and behavioral characteristics of special education students;

B) knowledge and skill in supervision of staff in inclusive classroom settings;

C) skill in financial analysis and management of special education programs;

D) knowledge of special education law;

E) knowledge of the research and best practice on inclusive programs, with a focus on programs for E/BD students;

F) knowledge and skill in program design, implementation, and assessment of curriculum and instruction designed to meet the needs of special education students, especially those with E/BD;

G) knowledge of interventions for the integration of E/BD students;

H) knowledge and skill in disseminating legal information and best-techniques to school administrators, teachers, parents, and community.

The project includes 1) customized courses in Special Education Law and Special Education Curriculum, Instruction, and Program Design as its foundation; 2) Leadership Institutes on specially selected topics to develop more refined knowledge and skills; 3) a year-long practicum, with a supporting seminar, for the effective application of the cognitive competencies; and 4) individual portfolios for demonstration and evaluation of the applied competencies.

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